What do we mean by progress?

Posted on 30 August 2011

The word 'progress' has many different meanings. It's previously been associated with industrial development and economic growth, but also with 'progressive' social movements. It is also often connected with newer concepts such as sustainability.

Since the 2002 release of Measures of Australia's Progress (MAP), the ABS has taken a broad view of progress, bringing together social, economic and environmental measures with the aim of helping people to assess progress for themselves MAP aims to assist people to answer the question 'Is life in Australia getting better?'.

In MAP, we define progress as the movement of society in a positive direction — an improvement. Importantly, this implies there are one or more broad goals which society is aspiring towards. To know whether we are progressing, we need to know what we are progressing towards. For this reason, we are asking Australians what aspirations they hold for national progress. We can then ensure our national progress measures address those areas of interest.

By asking people about their "aspirations for national progress" we are asking them what they care about and consider important for the future and wellbeing of Australian society. These aspirations will form the foundation of a conceptual framework against which we will check our measures and possibly develop new measures.

An important aspect of progress is that it relates to Australia as a whole, not just of the lives of individuals. For this consultation, we are focusing as far as possible on the views Australians hold about national progress, rather than on their views about their personal situation, or that of their family. Such views are certainly important, and we do capture many aspects of individuals' lives in our social statistics. But MAP focuses on statistics that allow national progress to be understood.

There are other concepts that relate to progress, such as wellbeing, quality of life, sustainability and happiness. While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, we've chosen the word 'progress' as it relates to the nation's overall wellbeing. However, a good quality of life for all Australians, or a sustainable economy or environment, may well be aspirations identified by Australians in this consultation – and if so, we will consider how to address these in our final product.

Some examples of other projects that uses these related concepts:

- The Economist Intelligence Unit's Quality-of-Life Index
- Canadian Index of Wellbeing
- Gross National Happiness

For a large list of related projects see the Similar Project page.

Return to Home

Comments

#1 Jason Brown
31/08/2011 10:22:49 AM What do we mean by progress?

. . .

An excellent initiative, found via WikiProgress.

Formalising concepts brewing through civil society over the last few decades is a welcome move from officialdom.

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November 2011 (4)

October 2011 (13)

September 2011 (91)

August 2011 (6)

July 2011 (1)

April 2011 (3)

It would be great to have a ready list o9f links to other such state efforts would be a great resource.

. . .

#2 Serhat (MAP team)
1/09/2011 10:01:11 AM What do we mean by progress?

Hi Jason

Thanks! We have two maps that have links to similar projects. While they are not an exhausitve collection of projects in this field, they do give an indication of the growth in interest in measuring progress both internationally and nationally. Link to 'Indicator Land' maps

#3 JJ Lin
2/09/2011 10:24:13 AM What do we mean by progress?

My background is in finance- investment management with exposure to both Aussie and International markets. Here is my view of what progress means.

1) GDP or GNP (GNP adds back the difference between export and import and In Australia case, our GNP is higher than GDP as we import more than export). It is this make up of GNP that bothers me. I see our progress not in term of GDP but GNP and its make-up.

2) Our manufacturing sector is less than 8% of GDP and most of this sector is in matured or old technology. While US has smaller manufacturing sector than before due to the fact that most consumer products are imported. But their manufacturing sector is newer-higher in technology curve and in new industries. This is similar in Germany and France. We as a nation should aim to wholesale change the manufacturing and rid of the older technology in existing industries and bring in new technology. We also need to introduce new industries such as high-tech, IT hardware design and manufacturing such as semi-conductor, power generation, transport power plants (locomotives), ship buildings, aerospace engineering and even proper petrochemical. None of these manufacturing can be labelled as labour intensive so it is all but due to capital investments and technology know-how and R&D.;

3) Our manufacturing and IT industries are more or less controlled by foreign corporate who have not the interest of Australia in mind. That is why some foreign-owned companies give us second rated products and services. We complain that our banks do not issue us the state of art credit card or bank card that Europeans have been using. This is because the software companies that dominate the ATM and cash register machines in stores do not want to bring in new technologies into Australia. So we have threat of gangs stealing our ID and money. Local owned manufacturers also are lax in their investments in new technology. There are also issues in steel making technology that reduce the appeal of Australian steel in international markets. We subsidize car manufacturers some $4bn every 5 years. With just 10 years, we could have $8bn to build a couple of the state of the art car plants. So why we are giving money away for 2nd and 3rd rated cars?Are you aware that not one single train in OZ has got a locomotive that is made in Australia? Not one... And yet we are talking about building fast rail line and trying to bringing new train carriages for the big metros. From the outset, we would be giving money away to overseas companies. Again, making locomotives is not labour intensive and all of them are made in Europe , USA and Japan so the high wage level question is not applicable. We should have our own governments- federal and states- using tax revenue to start new industries and new manufacturing such as semi-conductor plants, new car plants, new ship building, new locomotive manufacturing, new generator making, etc that could bring us huge amount of savings in import.

4) These new manufacturing industries will expand job opportunities. Our education system will fulfil their functions more properly rather than just are used to rip off overseas kids and families providing nothing but humanity and commerce courses that sadly do not add much to productivity.

The ABS and the politicians talk about the lowering of the productivity. The main reason it the growth of the financial industry and the disappearing of the manufacturing industry and the non-introduction of modern technology that we all use at home and work. In Japan, Korea and Taiwan and now in China, their governments have over the last few decades actively support local industries and bring in new industries. They do not have this hubris that their private sector could compete properly in the world at the early stage of their life. Australia and Aussies seem to think that we are better than the Asians and hence

no need to intervene and support actively. Taiwan went into semi-conductor manufacturing in 1985. Now they are the 4th largest semi-conductor manufacturer in the world and very close to the number 3- Japan- in value output. Taiwan is bigger than the rest of the world put together in this field. All the initial money came from the Taiwanese government that have since enjoyed the huge amount of revenue from the dividends and sales of some share holdings. They use this and other revenues to provide western-style social welfare, health system, education system, infrastructure building etc. So a government owned manufacturing industry and company could be very profitable. In Korea, they banned imports of all Japanese whitegooods till 2000. This allowed LG and Samsung to grow their whitegood industry. In 1996, Korea was admitted to the OECD so it was not a third world economy. In 1996, out of 1.6m cars sold in Korea, less than 16,000 were imported or less than 1% of all cars. We in Australia import 85% of all cars sold. So why is this hubris in Aussie psyche when the facts say that we are idiots in the real world economy?

5) These new manufacturing industries will spin 2nd and 3rd industries down-stream. In Taiwan, from the semi-conductor industry, mother-board, net router, LCD screen and now mobile phones have come from it. These companies have the Taiwanese semi-conductor company make the different chips used in their products as they know that there is this local plant for quick and easy output. If we have these new industries, many 2nd and 3rd industries will come through.

6) Our education system will then be better. The focus on humanity, art, commerce, finance and law may be nice. But they do not contribute much to the productivity of the economy. This means over long term, the economy will not have sufficient money to provide education in these fields at university. This applies to social services, health, primary-secondary education, infrastructure. Without a good manufacturing industry to maintain this high level of social care and services.

7) The measures of progress could be the level of happiness, the level of education, the level of home ownership, the level of psychological care, the level of women's role in the society, the size of houses, etc. But without a strong economy that is sustained by a strong manufacturing backbone, none of these levels of progress would reach any satisfactory level. No need to doubt my arguments. Most people that participate in this discussion have been

to other poorer parts of the world. The low level of progress in all the above measures in these nations are clear enough as symptoms of low economic productivity due to a 3rd rated manufacturing industry. It has nothing to do with greed or economic for that matter. It is about being realistic..... Anthropologists all agree that culture only arose from a settled and well off society. Without a certain level of prosperity, people will not have time to pursue simple cultural activities or anything else such as seeing the psychologist for mental illness. The hubris in believing that the improvements in the Aussie society since 20th century would continue is as silly as the feminist movements think that they have broken the glass ceiling properly. Nothing is free and no progress of any measurable manners will come about without a sustainably good economy. I hope ABS post my sincere comment.

#4 Skipper
6/09/2011 9:33:52 AM What do we mean by progress?

One measure of progress worth considering is the percentage of income is discretionary, ie after "fixed costs" such as mortgage payments or rent are excluded. Perhaps the Household Expenditure Survey could provide benchmarks for average expenditure on particular groups to determine a discretionary income component.

Wealh is another key indicator, and emphasis should be put on the housheld balance sheet estimates in the Australian National Accounts, and the movement in those.

"Free time" might also be measured, but I'd suggest a lot of people get confused with this measure, complaining of a lack of free time when an increasing proporton of households time is spent on social networks/scanning the web, rather than with family or face-to-face socialising,and consider 'free time' the residual after work, sleep and social networking.

More thoughts at another time.

Sean

#5 John
15/11/2011 1:00:24 AM What do we mean by progress?

While i dont have a educational background i do have a50+ years experience in Australia, and my country has move forward in leaps and bounds. Healthcare, educations and so much more has made Australia what it is today.

Read the government census website to see how far we have come.

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